

[Bureau of Reclamation, Western Colorado Area Office letterhead]
[mailed April 23, 1998]

WCN-LWest
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our April 14, 1998, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The next meeting has been tentatively scheduled to begin at 12:30 on Thursday, August 20 at the National Park Service multi-purpose room at Elk Creek Visitors Center near Blue Mesa Reservoir.

Highlights of the April operation meeting include:

--Snowpack above the Aspinall Unit was 106 percent of average on April 10, and most probable predicted spring inflow is 86 percent of normal. A spring peak of approximately 3,000 cfs for at least 2 days through the Black Canyon/Gunnison Gorge is planned for May. (Note: The mid-April inflow forecast increased to 93 percent following the operation meeting)

--Average monthly flows planned for the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Monument and Gunnison Gorge are around 800 to 1,000 cfs through September, with flows increasing to around 1,100 cfs for October through December. Snowpack may change in the next month, and these plans may change significantly as snowpack changes.

--There are several "special flow requests" that need to be considered as the water year progresses. From September 29 through October 2, flows through the Gunnison Gorge will be reduced to 600 cfs to help Colorado Division of Wildlife's annual trout census.

In addition, if you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meeting, please let us know. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ed Warner
Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, CCI-400
1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO 81401

Regional Solicitor's Office, Attention: Scott Loveless
125 South State Street, Room 6201, Salt Lake City UT 84138

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT

Attention: UC-282 (Bob Adams), UC-298 (Paul Davidson), UC-600, UC-320,
UC-332 (Ron Sutton) (ea w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, DMutz, EWarner, SMcCall, CStanton, LWest (ea w/encl)
WCN - KFogelquist, MSteves, RStorbo, JWright (ea w/o encl)

Distribution List - April 14, 1998 Aspinall Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Club 20 Greg Walcher, Shane Henry
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze*, Bo Gates
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club Steve Glazer*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
KNFS Environmental Services (Trans Colorado Pipeline Project) Craig Meis
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby*
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlauffer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District Mike Gross*, Dave Kanzer*, Ray Tenney
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Mark Catlin*, Jim Hokit*
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland*
Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District Kathleen Klein*
Mark Schumacher*, Dennis Steckel
Delta County Commissioners Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Ken Knox, Wayne Schieldt
Colorado Division of Wildlife Rick Anderson
Robert Caskey, Pat Martinez, Sherman Hebein*
Dan Braugh
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm*; Ray Alvarado
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Grady McNure
U.S. Bureau of Land Management John Arkins, Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy*
Roy Smith
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service John Hamill; Henry Maddux, George Smith
Terry Ireland, Rick Krueger, Chuck McAda*;
Reed Harris
U.S. National Park Service Chuck Pettee*; Mark Wondzell*
Rick Harris*; Sheridan Steele
Myron Chase*; Dave Roberts
U.S. National Weather Service Eric Holloway*, Mike Myers
U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard*, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller
U.S. Western Area Power Administration Gary Burton; Margaret Matter
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane, Ken Green*
Annette Falvo*
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Gary McDermott, Richard Stodt, Ed Warner*
Steve McCall*, Karen Fogelquist*, John Ozga*, Coll Stanton*, Russ Storbo, Lorrie West*
Bob Adams, Arlo Allen, Paul Davidson*, Chris Karas, Ron Sutton

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
April 14, 1998

Participation: This meeting was held in Grand Junction. Attendees are noted on the attached distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. This input is also used in development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which also includes plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units. Operation of the Aspinall Unit is based on projected inflows to its reservoirs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flows for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties.

Handouts provided include background data on projected inflows to the reservoirs; proposed operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts; and snow course information.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations to protect downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River National Monument are being completed. These operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss proposals for long-term operation plans to address these and related resource management issues, including completion of a Draft Biological Opinion on Aspinall operations that is scheduled for completion in 1999.

January-April 1998 Operation: Graphs were presented to show inflow and content of Blue Mesa and Crystal releases and flows in the river below the Gunnison Tunnel during this period.

During this period flows through the Black Canyon declined from around 2,000 cfs to 750 cfs as irrigation diversions began through the Gunnison Tunnel and in response to no major increase in snowpack. On March 7, flows were reduced to around 700 cfs to facilitate repair work on the Gunnison Diversion Dam.

Proposed April-August 1998 Operation: At the time of the meeting, the snowpack above Blue Mesa is 106 percent of normal. The most probable inflow--600,000 acre-feet--is 86 percent of normal. Minimum and maximum probable inflows range from 420,000 acre-feet (60% of normal) to 780,000 acre-feet (112% of normal).

Blue Mesa Reservoir is projected to fill or nearly fill in late June or early July under most probable conditions. Average monthly flows through the Black Canyon are projected at around 800-1,000 cfs through September; with increases to around 1,100 cfs from October through December as irrigation diversions are reduced.

Reclamation discussed providing a "peak" in the flows during May. This peak would result in approximately 3,000 cfs through the Black Canyon. Paul Davidson with Reclamation noted that the peak would be generated by the scheduled bypass of water out of Crystal Dam rather than the random bypass of the Crystal Powerplant that often occurs during runoff because of excessive tributary inflows. In one respect, we are just "reshaping" the bypasses that would likely occur during runoff anyway. No water is currently projected to bypass either Blue Mesa or Morrow Point except for bypasses during the planned inspection of the penstocks at Blue Mesa. Operations at Blue Mesa and Morrow Point are designed to allow Blue Mesa to fill by the end of July as historically is the case provided there is adequate runoff.

Reclamation's original "peak" proposal was to start ramping up to the peak on May 21 and return to base flows on June 2. Ramp up rates would be 500 cfs per day (250 cfs in the morning and another

250 cfs at night). Ramp down would be 400 cfs per day (200 cfs in the morning and another 200 cfs at night). The peak of 3,000 cfs through the Black Canyon would be maintained for 2-days. The peak would result in approximately 22,000 acre-feet bypassing the Crystal Powerplant. The present capacity of the powerplant is approximately 2,030 cfs. As noted earlier, bypasses at Crystal may be necessary anyway, and this planned peak would more or less consolidate these anticipated bypasses into one peak. If inflow predictions increase in the next 4-6 weeks, the duration or the height of the peak could be increased, or possibly both. There was considerable discussion and input on the peak:

*The BLM and recreation interests supported the concept but recommended avoiding fluctuating flows over the Memorial Day Holiday (May 23-25).

*Hank Hotze with Gunnison River Expeditions believed that the peak flows are in a safe range from rafters' standpoint, but was concerned that the peak be early enough so as not to impact rainbow trout at the critical swim-up stage. Fluctuations and peaks in June are also hard on commercial guides and private recreationists. He would prefer to see the peak a few days earlier than planned, and would prefer not to have the ramping up and down on weekends.

*The National Park Service supported the concept and believed the amount of the peak was appropriate under the present snowpack. The timing of the peak was fine with them, but earlier in May would also be fine. A higher peak would be beneficial if water supplies warrant.

*The FWS believes the peak should occur sometime between May 15 and June 15. Moving it up a few days before May 21 would be fine. If possible, the peak should attempt to match the peak on the North Fork to provide high flows in the endangered fish habitat downstream.

*The Colorado Division of Wildlife stated that brown trout fry should be big enough to manage with the peak; however, rainbow trout start emerging from the gravels around June 10 and fluctuations/high flows can be harmful after that time. CDOW is also concerned about the content of Blue Mesa. Studies are beginning to show that as the storage decreases, lake trout predation on kokanee increases. The Blue Mesa kokanee fishery and kokanee run may be the most important in the United States.

*In response to questions, both the FWS and NPS said the 3,000 cfs peak was large enough to do some good and it is an appropriate peak under reported water supply conditions.

*The Colorado River Water Conservation District was concerned with how peaking water would be accounted for. Is it bypass, storage water, or what? There was discussion that the "peaking" water might be accounted for as part of the "Dallas and Dolores Project mitigation water." Biological Opinions on these two projects called for making up depletions from these projects from Blue Mesa or another appropriate source.

*The Colorado Water Conservation Board asked similar questions and expressed some concern with providing a peak (for endangered fish) before the FWS had prepared a Biological Opinion on the Aspinall Unit (the Opinion would contain recommendations on how to operate the Unit to protect downstream endangered fish). The Colorado Water Conservation Board also expressed concern with providing a peak to the National Monument absent quantification of the Monument's Reserved Water Right or a contract to do so. The Conservation Board also reminded the group that they believed that the Colorado River Storage Project Act required that first, the reservoirs fill when possible; and second, avoid bypassing the powerplants. Given the runoff conditions, it may not be possible to avoid bypasses in which case it seems appropriate to make anticipatory releases that would benefit other resources such as has been done at other CRSP facilities.

In conclusion, the group recommended Reclamation continue with the spring peak planning this year and that Reclamation would fully document the rationale and reasoning behind it since neither the NPS or FWS made specific research flow requests this year. Reclamation will also look at beginning the

peak a little earlier in May considering some of the concerns mentioned above. The FWS agreed to provide a letter concerning the spring peak if needed..

Special Flow Requests: There are upcoming activities that require special Gunnison River flow considerations:.

--CDOW will be collecting fish between Crystal Dam and the Black Canyon the week of April 19 and would appreciate stable flow conditions. Flows should be stable during this period--no changes at Crystal Dam or the Gunnison Tunnel are anticipated.

--The Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) requested flows of 600 cfs to complete the annual trout inventory in the Gunnison Gorge from 10 am on Tuesday, September 29 through noon on Friday, October 2.

--Work scheduled at Morrow Point between October 15 and November 15 will limit releases to 1,500 cfs, which should not present problems at that time of year. This should not affect downstream flows because irrigation demands will be very low at that time.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities

National Park Service - NPS has no special flow requests this year. Planned spring peak should be good for Monument resources. They hope to present information on the quantification of the Monument's reserved water right before the end of 1998. All field data has been collected and initial coordination with Federal agencies is ongoing. Mark Wondzell will transfer to the NPS Montrose office on June 9.

Fish and Wildlife Service - Chuck McAda reported scientists are finishing reports on individual recovery program studies to be consolidated into the 'Synthesis Report' which should be completed in draft form by the end of 1998. The Redlands fish ladder was opened about 4 weeks ago and is being monitored. Use is relatively low at the present time, probably due to the cold water conditions.

Bureau of Reclamation - Don Phillips is the new manager at Curecanti Field Division. Penstock inspection at Blue Mesa will occur in June; spillway gates can be used at that time so flows should not be affected. Material has been received this week from project proponents on the AB Lateral Hydropower Project, so work on the supplemental EIS should begin soon.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Mike Gross requested an update on the "NPS reserved right and the FWS biological opinion." He updated the group on Judge Brown's decision on the Arapaho Case. He pointed out that a need for contracts for subordination (60,000 acre-feet above Aspinall Unit) was mentioned in the ruling. The ruling also referenced "operating criteria" for the Unit and Mike thought that development of such criteria would help resolve operation questions.

Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District - Kathleen Klein, new manager for the District, expressed continued interest in working with the operation group and in seeing the endangered fish synthesis report and flow recommendations when completed.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Kokanee release from Roaring Judy Hatchery into Gunnison River and Blue Mesa is scheduled for April 24. Will be collecting rainbow trout below Crystal next week for health analysis. The September 29-October 2 census of Gunnison Gorge trout fishery is still

scheduled.

Colorado Water Conservation Board - Randy Seaholm reported that Ken Knox from the State Engineer's office in Montrose would be transferring to Denver. Also emphasized the importance that work on implementing the 60,000 acre-foot continue so that the accounting needed to implement any Biological Opinion recommendations and the NPS reserved water rights for the Black Canyon can resume. Randy also offered the Board's assistance as necessary to help assure this happens given the personnel changes occurring.

Western Area Power Administration - Western requested that the National Park Service keep them informed on the schedule for beginning use of the tour boat on Morrow Point. Also the Units are in the "wet season operation" which restricts reservoir fluctuations at Crystal to 4 feet per day to reduce landslide potential. With this restriction, lead time is needed to make changes in flows and operations.

Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association - The water users completed their repairs on the Gunnison Diversion Dam in one day.

Trans Colorado Pipeline - Craig Meis reported that the planned crossing of the Gunnison River (near Roubideau Creek) is planned for mid-September. Crossing work takes 4 weeks, including reclamation of riverbanks.

Next Meeting - Scheduled for Thursday, **August 20** at 12:30, in the **National Park Service's multi-purpose room at Elk Creek Visitors Center next to Blue Mesa Reservoir.**